

1 PROJECT

22 ARTISTS

**24 ORIGINAL
WOOLWORTHS ITEMS**

**TOTALLY
REINVENTED**

reworthit!
WOOLWORTHS

**SPECTACULAR
IDEAS
INSIDE!**



Introduction

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Reworthit! catalogues the work of 22 artists who have marked the centenary year of Woolworths by producing artworks in response to the sudden closure of this familiar high street brand at the end of 2008.¹

The news of the chain's impending store closures prompted me to invite artists and designers to join the 'W001worths project'. They were asked to visit their nearest branch of Woolworths before its demise and explore its wares with a critical anthropological eye. The proposal was simple: "gather materials, even pic 'n' mix them, from this vanishing archive before it is consigned to the history books and use them to create a piece of work that comments on its history or the issues surrounding the closure".²

To track the final days of Woolworths' stores, the participants of the W001worths project posted many images of the stores as they closed nationally. Interiors and exteriors of various branches were photographed along with images of bought items and work-in-progress.³

The site provided a truly eclectic collection of images in their virtual online reality just as 'art began to imitate life' for Woolworths itself and the brand name re-emerged as an online store in February 2009.

I have always held a quiet fascination with found objects that

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A year shy of its centenary Woolworths announced its closure in November 2008 and ceased trading on 6th January 2009.

2

Original e-mail invitation to artists was sent out on 12th December 2008. The W001worths Project began as an open response to the idea of making work from objects retrieved from the closing stores.

3

www.flickr.com/groups/w001worths is home to presently 188 images from the W001worths Project. The primary Customer Service Managers (the curators) were Stephen Bottomley and Lin Cheung.

become transformed from the everyday to the extraordinary. Mundane everyday items may be elevated to a status reserved normally for more precious treasured materials or simply represented as iconic objects, as the pop art soup tins of Andy Warhol, the boxes of Joseph Cornell, or assemblages of Kurt Schwitters. Objects may be reborn in many ways, either imbued with sentimental memory or collectively laced with narrative and metaphor as demonstrated by the masters of Dadaism and Surrealism; André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray and Salvador Dali. I wanted these objects from the days of Woolworths stores across Great Britain to be not only transformed, but in some small way, saved. This catalogue is testament to how these small tokens have been given new life and meaning.

*"I believe that a good penny and
sixpence store, run by a live Yankee,
would be a sensation here."*

—F.W. Woolworth C.1908

F. W. Woolworth opened his first UK store in Liverpool in November 1909, a subsidiary of the American retail chain he had founded in Pennsylvania 1879 and his stores were indeed a sensation. During the mid 1920's a store opened every seventeen days and between the wars, 350 stores opened establishing them as familiar high street figures.

F. W. Woolworth was the first chain to make its own brand items, so minimizing dependence on suppliers. After a re-branding exercise in the 1970s, both the UK and US Woolworth companies dropped the 'F. W.' from their fascia design and introduced the 'W' motif to become Woolworths. During the 1980's the iconic brand changed ownership after a series of buyouts and by the 1990s the brand was in economic difficulty.

The reason for their closure—99 years after being established—was a mixture of social, cultural and economic change. These factors included a shift in the way the public now shopped, our society's changing values and significantly, the downturn in the UK economy during the 2009 credit crunch forced the last 815 stores to close.

For Woolworths, the story is not over as the brand's philosophy refuses to become extinct. One highly profitable branch in Dorchester re-opened in February 2009 under its previous

manager as 'Wellworth', the same month that Woolworths announced its new online store, www.woolworths.co.uk. Also, on November 5th 2009, a previous director of a branch of Woolworths opened an 'Allworth' high street store in Didcot, Oxfordshire to coincide precisely with the 100th anniversary.



Photograph by Suzi Tibbells

What was 'the Wonder of Woolies'?

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F. W. Woolworths, founded in 1879 in Pennsylvania, USA became a household name in Britain and its many branches became familiar sights in our towns and on our high streets. Following the announcement in 2008 that the company was to close, statutory liquidation documents would have been produced to assess the financial value of its assets. As complex and detailed as these documents may be, the final valuation report based on tangible goods is, however, not the whole story; in the same way as 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' one might argue that the real value of Woolworths resides in the collective memory of generations of consumers and reflects social and cultural experiences, memories, and aspirations. This essay, therefore, sets out to contemplate a different way of evaluating Woolworths by questioning its role within British society.

When F. W. Woolworths first shop appeared in Britain in 1909 in Church Street, Liverpool it offered a very different shopping experience to its customers. The floor plan of Woolworths encouraged the consumer to browse at length before making decisions or purchases, in contrast to the traditional design where shoppers were expected to know what they wanted, buy it and leave.¹ Woolworths was the first chain to market its own brand items, thus minimising its dependence on suppliers and so was

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"A History of Woolies: 99 years of Pic 'n' Mix." The Times. (26.11.2008)
http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/retailing/article5237402.ece (Retrieved 6.1.2010)

able to offer a wide range of goods including china, glass, clothes, haberdashery and stationery all priced between threepence and sixpence. Free pots of tea were offered to shoppers in the first year in order to entice them in to experience this new American way of shopping. Frank Woolworth's belief in the success of the company was perhaps confirmed when on its first day of trading the Church Street shop ran out of pic 'n' mix sweets. Woolworths' popularity continued to increase over the ensuing decades so that by 1950 it was a well-established household name with 762 branches in the United Kingdom.

The changes taking place in British society in the 1950s had a significant influence on the success of Woolworths—the American way of life had become an attractive ideal for many young Britons, who were keen to embrace both its culture and its material goods. As historian Andrew Jackson notes: "To the British establishment the American capitalist system that encouraged mass consumption and planned obsolescence was a threat to the old cultural order of stability and permanence. To the average Briton it offered a rich and desirable future."² These changes in British society coincided with a steady increase in affluence and a world-wide economic boom. The increase in production and availability of consumer goods in turn stimulated mass consumption and

heightened consumers' expectations; televisions and refrigerators became necessities rather than the luxuries of the pre-war era.³ With consumers finding themselves with more money to spend on treats, not just necessities, Woolworths was well placed to meet the growing needs of its customers and provide a range of products to satisfy their ever-increasing appetite for a more material lifestyle.

During this period teenagers also began to recognise themselves as a separate social group and they too used material goods, pop music and fashion to differentiate themselves from the adult world and to express their own particular identities. Here again Woolworths was able to tap into this new market and provide merchandise to meet these teenagers' requirements. The company's approach to pop music is an interesting one since to begin with they were unable to sell chart music.

"In 1962, the Beatles arrived, and the mania that followed brought huge demand for Fab Four merchandise. Woolies obliged with dolls and car mascots of the band, but at the time it did not sell chart music in Britain or America. Instead, it offered cover versions by unknown artists on the Embassy Record Label. So, rather than 'A Hard Day's Night' performed by John, Paul, George and Ringo, fans could purchase the 'Embassy sounds like the Beatles'

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A History of Woolies: 99 years of Pic 'n' Mix. "The Times. (26.11.2008)
http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/retailing/article5237402.ece. (Retrieved 6.1.2010)

5

Douglas B Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: the principles of cultural branding*, Harvard Business School Press, Harvard, 2004, pp3-4.

alternative: 'A Hard Day's Night', performed by 'not the Beatles but the Typhoons'." ⁴

Without Woolworths and its cheap pop paraphernalia many British teenagers would not have found it so easy to assert their new-found identities and cultural independence.

This rise in consumer power enabled the company to forge bonds with consumers of all ages, through a range of items such as its clothes, pic 'n' mix sweets, pop music, stationery for pupils and students and household items for setting up digs or keeping a long-established household in good order. This bond in turn helped Woolworths to become a cultural icon. Douglas B. Holt in his book *How Brands Become Icons*, discusses the process of a brand becoming such an iconic symbol and the psychological framework for this: "Acting as vessels of self-expression, the brands are imbued with stories that consumers find valuable in constructing their identities. Consumers flock to brands that embody the ideals they admire, brands that help them express who they want to be." ⁵ Whilst Woolworths did not share the same glamorous appeal or status as Harrods for example, it certainly functioned as a cultural icon. The number of stories shared online by the public when they heard the company was to close and the responses of the artists who have participated in Reworthit! are a

testimony to the depth and breadth of our emotional ties with Woolworths.

The fact that Woolworths was one of the few retailers who could boast of being given its own nickname, also provides further evidence of the iconic status of the company. The truncation of Woolworths to 'Woolies' is undoubtedly a term of convenience but it is also evidence of the sense of affection for the company and the depth of the emotional bond felt by the public. Whilst the name 'Woolies' highlights the fondness for the company, it also conjures up garments made from wool, suggesting a sense of security, domesticity and comfort. When asked in 2008 to summarise the company's strengths, a spokesman for Woolworths replied that the chain focuses on: "the home, family and entertainment". ⁶ Here then is another key constituent of its value: 'Woolies' was considered as an old friend, or part of the family; not someone you necessarily give much thought to, yet one who can be relied on to provide the things you need when it counts.

The many radio and television discussions and online comments and blogs written leading up to the company's demise provide evidence of the public's strength of feeling. There are countless accounts of childhood visits to the shop to spend pocket money; of going to buy sweeties with Granny on the way home

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What is the point of Woolworths?
BBC News Magazine (26.11.2008)
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7741199.stm>
(Retrieved 6.1.2010)

from school, buying Ashes of Violets perfume for your mum for Mothering Sunday, a box of Black Magic chocolates for your girlfriend on a first date or plastic soldiers to play with in your mate's backyard. Cultural critic, Esther Leslie in an article on souvenirs and memories considers the way we internalise such relationships with places and objects so that they form an intrinsic part of ourselves: "Experience, events, objects are not eternal and ever same, but specific, located. Memory of experience, events and objects is recast in terms of the rememberer's own place of recollection, own desires."⁷

Perhaps never before had one shop been responsible for such a variety of everyday objects in the average British consumer's home—we were surrounded by objects with memories all related to a single location. It is therefore, unsurprising that Woolworths had such a nostalgic pull on so many people. In many ways nostalgia is the most intriguing of the emotions; it is transient and unique, difficult to pin down and describe since everyone will experience it in a slightly different way. Linda Hutcheson in her essay 'Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern' accounts for the phenomenon's power as follows: "Nostalgia [...] may depend precisely on the irrecoverable nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that

likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power. [...] This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire".⁸ It is then this re-imagining and re-remembering that enables certain brands to embed themselves so deeply within our psyche.

A discussion of Woolworths and its place as a cultural memory-maker would not be complete without some thought being given to the pic 'n' mix and its temptations. The lure of the shiny and colourful wrapping papers, the accessibility of the sweets, toffees and chocolates in easy to reach containers and the sheer abundance of choice on offer, meant that it was often too difficult to avoid falling prey to 'the five-finger discount'; many people can trace the beginning of their (often short-lived) shoplifting career to the pic 'n' mix. That isn't to say that Woolies inspired generations of kleptomaniacs unable to curb their desires but rather that the pic 'n' mix presented many of us with our first experience of the thrills of shopping: the sense of desire, the thrill of immediate gratification, the ensuing guilt at such self-indulgence and even pride in our accumulation of material possessions.

Ironically, it was perhaps our ever-growing need to relate to objects and create narratives and meanings that provided a key problem for Woolworths and played an integral part in its

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Thomas Hine, *I Want That! How We All Became Shoppers*, Harper Collins, New York, 2002, p7.

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'What is the point of Woolworths?'
BBC News Magazine (26.11.2008)
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7741199.stm>
(Retrieved 6.1.2010)

downfall: contemporary society is filled with things which we consume and discard without a second thought, in search of meanings in new things. Ultimately the everyday products bought from Woolies could not live up to the increasing speed of this cycle of need. No matter how useful that squeeze mop might be just how attached can you become to it and what sort of memories might it evoke? Thomas Hine, author of *I Want That!*, comments that the apathy rather than amazement provoked by Wal Mart 'is a perverse tribute to the plenitude of our consumer society and the weakness of the emotional ties that bind us to the many objects in our lives. Never before has so much seemed so dull.'⁹ Hine could just as easily be commenting on the British high street Woolworths where so many goods were gathered together under its roof, yet, instead of marvelling at this we too had become unimpressed and apathetic. What had been Woolworths' charm in its early days became the millstone around its neck for a more sophisticated late twentieth century consumer who expects a greater choice and 'solutions' to match their identity. Greg Hodge of Planet Retail rightly observes: "The sad thing is that people I speak to still have a place in their hearts for it [Woolworths] but it tends to be elderly or people with children. But even they can look at the toys and see they can get them cheaper at Tesco."¹⁰

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'What is the point of Woolworths?'
BBC News Magazine (26.11.2008)
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7741199.stm>
(Retrieved 6.1.2010)

Woolworths stopped trading on 6 January 2008. Coincidentally the 6 January is when the Church traditionally celebrates the Feast of Epiphany—the arrival of the three wise men in Bethlehem each of them bearing their exotic gifts. Woolworths, throughout its hundred year history, provided people with gifts for all occasions; Christmas, birthday, Father's day etc. For generations of shoppers, in a quiet and understated way, Woolworths has been a ubiquitous part of our lives, it has joined in our celebrations, tried to meet our 'life-style aspirations' and for many of us the company has achieved a clear place in our memories. The breadth of this intervention in our daily lives was, to paraphrase the company's 1977 advertisement, 'the wonder of good ole Woolies.' BBC journalist, Tom Geoghegan, is right to claim that when 'Woolies' closed we not only lost a chain-store, we lost an institution.¹¹

Woolworths stores (from left to right, top to bottom):
Epsom: Ian Parker, 2 x Peckham: Laura Potter, Manchester: Sarah O'Hana,
Edinburgh: Stephen Bottomley



Woolie Ideas and the Curious Maker

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Imagine that a friend has just turned up unannounced at your home and empties a huge bag of objects, all from Woolworths, onto the living room floor. After the initial expletives, you might be intrigued enough to examine them. Some things belong in the “I could do with one of those” or “keep it, you never know” categories. Duplicate items are packed away in reserve, ready to step in should its successor fail. To the mind of a Curious Maker¹ (and in the hands and heart connected to that mind) these objects represent an entirely new material to hone, shape and daub with.

The Curious Maker lurks within all makers, regardless of how masterful or unique the skill of their day job is. At night with the curtains drawn, this thrifty maker within awakens to the faintest rustle of packaging like man's best friend. Thrifty with resources but not in spirit, the Curious Maker often chooses packaging over the packaged, finding it infinitely more attractive and challenging than the obvious contents. Whilst the contemporary maker moves ideas ever forward just to remain current, the Curious Maker is not bound by such conventions. He² works on sheer impulse and abandons tried and tested making philosophies. He takes apart and reconfigures—inverting meaning. A hoarder and a collector by nature, the Curious Maker is Green without a revolution, naturally re-using and recycling what ever is to hand.

¹

These ramblings would not be possible without the works featured within this project by each of the 22 artists, and I thank them all whole-heartedly for the metaphoric fly tipping of their Woolie ideas into my mind.

²

'He' is used here and throughout for ease and does also mean 'she'.

His creative output is often humorous, animated, can be absurd and is both useful and useless. These resemblings³ fulfil a very specific need, solve a particular problem, are often poetic, sometimes meditative and they take on a 'needs must' aesthetic that have a charm all of their own.

Woolworths connects deeply with the 'make do and mend' mentality of the Curious Maker—even if this philosophy has lost its relevance somewhat in recent years. Woolie's cheap and cheerful range of products aided endless creative possibilities like an artists' supply store permanently on sale with knockdown prices as their premium. Where else can you reliably buy lots of something for less than £1 to turn into instant art jewellery? Everyone loves a bargain. The goods, tacky as they are, inhabit an in-between world that a maker is all too familiar with. Objects that could be good, but aren't and not quite the same as the original. These unfulfilled objects seem to set off in the Curious Maker a desire to explore their potential, see the 'good side'. In some cases, seeks to elevate it in true Duchampian style: 'I'm here, therefore I am' as opposed to 'I was there, on the shelf, therefore insignificant'.

The closure of Woolworths stores stirred a great sense of loss. The Curious Maker's propensity for nostalgia recalls experiences of Woolworths like the wardrobe in *The Chronicles of Narnia*: enter

the store as a child through one of its doors and leave as an adult through another. The idea that our fond memories of Woolies could oddly be remembered and lost in the same thought triggers a longing to connect with it further, reflecting a loss of innocence perhaps. Reworthit! represents for the makers and artists that have taken part in the project, a chance to revisit those memories of toys, games, sweets and household goods and interact with them at a different time in life for entirely different ends. In the current climate of political conflict, toy soldiers have become more sinister; My little Pony grows up; Fruit Salads have gone stale and essential everyday items are immortalised in bronze. As with all things lost, they can never be regained. Unless of course you tap into the mind of a Curious Maker, in which case the spirit of Woolies lives on through each and every creative gesture.

Jeweller

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From a union...
a space between...
the gap left by something removed...
the discarded or disposable...
something new and original will follow.

I initially chose this object as a set of cheap utilitarian stainless steel teaspoons with bold graphic packaging, but then the form of the blister packaging suggested an interesting direction.

I painted the plastic packaging white and then laser scanned it. The plastic interior of the case was then used as a mould and filled with ceramic plaster and the new spoon was built from the laser scan in resin and cast in precious metal. The new silver spoon was then cleaned, polished and laser etched with its title 'Spoonings' and given a 2009 Edinburgh hallmark.

A tale of rags to riches.

Spoonings, 2009

Silver, ceramic and printed card

Photograph by artist



Sculptor

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Woolworths originally sold utilitarian, everyday items and a bath plug is essential for any household. Recasting one (along with its floating companion) in copper and bronze is to forever immortalise it for the home.

Ducky, 2010

55mm x 110mm x 60mm

Bronze, steel and copper

Photograph by S&S



Jeweller

I make my own greeting cards for friends and colleagues but for my immediate family I always send them a card that indicates rather obviously our relationship i.e. 'Brother', 'Sister and her Husband', 'Niece', 'Nephew', etc. Woolworths was *the* place to go when it came to the family ritual at Christmas time to try and outdo each other with the most obvious card each person could find.

These brooches are made from selected parts of a greetings card, highlighting a blatantly inauthentic sentiment.

Something for the Whole Family, 2008

Each piece approximately 7cm x 3cm

Paper, laminating plastic, stainless steel wire

Photograph by artist



Metalsmith

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'Worth It' 01 & 02 are a reflection on the 'Lanchester Strategy' for sales and marketing, which include battle inspired strategies. Unfortunately Woolworths finally lost!

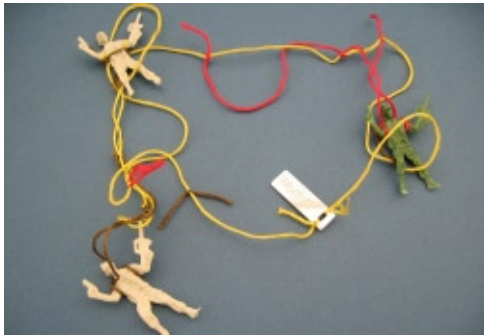
Worth It 02, 2009

80cm long x 4cm

Plastic soldiers, stainless steel

tag, embroidery silk

Photograph by artist



Worth It 01, 2009

60cm long x 4cm

Plastic soldiers, stainless steel tags,
chrome plated sink chain, gold plated rings

Photograph by artist



Jeweller

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I am interested in creating work which responds to representations of the world today. I use visual puns and text as well as more abstract forms of expression to develop my ideas. Political situations to more frivolous frolicking depicted by the media have been explored in my work. I am also interested in money as a source material; I like the idea of making contemporary statements about women wearing money.

I printed an actual till receipt onto aluminium sheet and then formed it to represent a till roll shape.

Woolworths Till Receipt Neckpiece, 2009

6cm x 2cm

Printed aluminium, rubber and silver tubing

Photograph by Nigel Tissington



Jeweller & Silversmith

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The vast array of pick and mix sweets and confectionary was often the first thing you were greeted with when entering a Woolworths store. I chose 'Fruit Salad' chewy sweets and a paper plate to inspire the creation of a sterling silver 'exhausted' scoop as a comment on the not so fresh, tired state of Woolworths.

Not Fresh Fruit Salad, 2009

2cm x 30cm x 20cm

Sterling silver, chewy sweets

Photograph by artist



Jeweller

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'Garland' was inspired by the many parties and picnics that I went to throughout my childhood, where almost all of them were laid out on white plastic table covers from Woolworths.

Garland, 2009

137cm x 7.5cm x 7.5cm

Plastic table covers, whipping twine

Photograph by artist



Illustrator

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I wanted to preserve Woolworths, so I illustrated the front of as many Woolworths buildings as I could find!

Everything Must Go, 2009

Dip pen, water colour and Photoshop



Designer & Jeweller

In respect of the recent focus in the media regarding the 'gun culture' of Britain I felt I would like to make comment. 'Party Favour' A base metal chain with 18ct Gold plate makes reference to the 'bling' street styling of jewellery on youths in cities like London. The inexpensive, brightly coloured, 'party favours' purchased from Woolworth's are a statement about the young demographic using guns on the streets and the often infantile reasoning behind a gun killing.

Party Favours, 2009

45cm long x 20cm

Base metal curb chain, 18ct gold plate,
multi-coloured plastic guns

Photograph by Rebecca Sweeting



Jeweller

My initial idea was to make one piece using parts from each of the items I bought. What came out of the explosion on my work table and the compositions and collages formed were actually two quite separate pieces. The items that I ended up using were a plastic ruler, which is something that was around in my childhood, and CD cases and a video camera which certainly did not exist back in the day. I found that I had subconsciously separated the materials and made two pieces, each representing something different. 'Ruled By Change' frames the plastic in silver as though it is trapped in the past. In contrast 'Then They Took Flight' has open borders, suggesting new possibilities.

Ruled By Change, 2009

Plastic ruler, silver

Photograph by artist



Then They Took Flight, 2009

Plastic, leaves, silver

Photograph by artist



Sculptor & Designer

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Transforming materials from what they are to what you wish them to become has always been of interest, an interest which continues in the two pieces mentioned..

The drains became lenses for glass frames, two dissimilar diameters, the scissors and thread became a stand for a container.

Devils Sowing Basket, 2009

Plastic, copper, paint

Photograph by artist



Son of Tzara, 2009

Copper, plastic, chrome and paint

Photograph by artist



Jeweller

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'To rise like a phoenix from the ashes' refers to a mythological bird that lived for five or six centuries in the Arabian desert. After that time it burnt itself in a funeral pyre and rose from the ashes with renewed youth to live through another cycle. The work for this project employs no traditional jewellery techniques and does not exist as a piece of jewellery. Instead, a series of transient images illustrate the transformation of new life after Woolworths' calamitous end, suggesting hope and reinvention of the once familiar high street store.

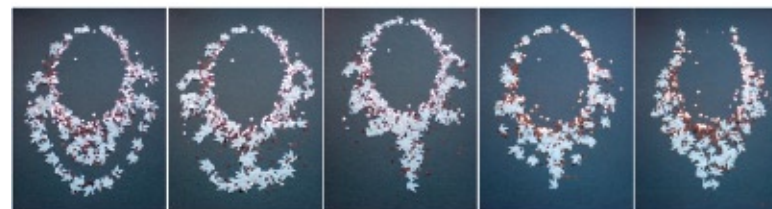
The confetti was sheer impulse with no intended outcome in mind and it offered an instant method for drawing. We have all played like this with materials: marks in sand or gravel and even with crumbs on a table. As the confetti took shape, I realised they were turning from sinister to sunny, curiously passing through some traditional necklace formations. I became drawn to these shapes and to safeguard each formation, I photographed them in sequence to produce simple animation effects.

Phoenix, 2009

Approximately 26 cm x 15 cm

Plastic confetti

Photograph by artist



Artist & Academic

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I went to Russia once, maybe six months before the collapse of Communism. The shops had nothing in them—nothing at all. I had money, I wanted to consume, but there was nothing to buy. Standing in the space of a partially denuded Woolworths in southern England just before Christmas 2008 I felt the echo of that experience, a kind of post capitalist version of it; endless remnants and fragments, the detritus of plenty.

Buy a plate with badly painted roses on it, like something my Grandmother may have had, break it into small pieces and photograph the pieces. Buy six Christmas lights, scatter them on a grey painted board and photograph them. Buy 1lb of Pic'n' Mix, melt it and photograph the result. The resulting photographic images constitute the work.

Christmas lights, 2009

76cm x 50.5 cm

Digital 'C' type photographic print



Plate with roses, 2009

76cm x 50.5 cm

Digital 'C' type photographic print



Jeweller

Finding these lonely replacement light bulbs in Woolworths as they closed their doors for the last time, I was drawn to their sadness. They will never be replaced, never to fulfill their purpose again.

I felt these lights should live again allowing the magic of Woolworths to shine on, especially through the memory of Pic'n' Mix sweets!

Sweet Light, 2009

4.5cm x 30cm

Replacement light bulbs, Pic'n'Mix sweets,

Electrical wire, Polyurethane glue

Photograph by artist



Designer & Maker

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When I moved to London as a student, I was permanently short of cash and I loved Woolworths for its cheap goods. They were not the most beautiful or high-quality but I liked the entertainment value of gawping at the strange toys and gadgets they sold. "Who would buy this, why would you?" I thought. That, to me, was what Woolworths was about: supplying people on a low budget with the things they do and do not need.

To symbolise the chaos in the Woolworths shops in their final days, I filled a pepper bottle with the letters W-O-O-L-W-O-R-T-H-S. I imagined these scattered out all over the place, just like the dispersed goods and employees of Woolworths. But then in a positive light and like sharing a cake, I perforated paper plates with the same letters so that even the 'breaking' of Woolworths can be a gesture of goodwill: the urge to come together, to share and to carry on in a positive way.

Plates to Share, 2009

1cm high x 19 cm

paper

Photograph by artist



Pepper Bottle, 2009

8.5cm high x 5 cm

Glass, plastic, card

Photograph by artist



Jeweller

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Woolworths has been seen as a household name for 99 years. I have found it really sad that this big institution has so smoothly sunk away making little to no difference to the majority of the population. This once familiar brand has so quickly been overlooked and slipped into the recess of consumer memory. I was interested in exploring the idea that a piece could appear to be sinking into the wearer.

I was attracted by the childish association with this basic craft process and the fun range of colours supplied in a Create bead bucket. I wanted to explore the technique and manipulate the beads to create a more sophisticated object than the manufacturer intended. The association with childhood lead me to consider the homely, family themes which came out in the final piece.

Teatime, 2009

Plastic beads, mirrored plastic, silver

Photograph by Kimberly Powell



Jeweller

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I took a grater apart, then hammered, annealed, flattened, rolled and folded the sides. Finally I riveted the two parts together with a gold pin. I wanted to use cold working techniques, rather than soldering, to reflect the way that the original cheese grater was originally made (pierced, punched and folded).

Worth It! Bracelet, 2009

6cm tall x 6cm diameter approx.

Tin, 750 Gold

Photograph by artist



Artist

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My response relates to a huge part of Woolworths – its Pic'n'Mix section. I would say most people are guilty, whether as a child or later in life, of pinching the odd sweet from the Pic'n'Mix without losing too much sleep over it. I recorded 40 minutes of audio whilst walking around my local childhood store in Warminster, and a large part of it contained a lecture from a mother to her children about the criminality of taking sweets from the Pic'n'Mix without paying for them. I have extracted this and hope that it takes people back to their youth, as well as raising what is to some, a huge moral issue...

The sound recording can be accessed through this link:
<http://www.suzitibbetts.com/Woolworths.html>

Pic'n'Mix, Dec 2008 / July 2009

12cm x 12cm x 20cm

Pic'n'Mix bag, electronics, audio

Photograph by artist



Jeweller

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Woolworths, unknown in France, turned out to be the inspirational goose that laid the golden egg for my work after only two years spent in London. For any self-respecting foreign student looking for good deals, Woolworths is the perfect place to buy one's first kettle and toaster!

But its ironic pop-entertainment value is often at a loss when dealing with the need for simple common thought! 'Pony Valley', glitter glue, Painting by numbers kits, and stickers in relief; the desire to consume the whole without moderation served with a king-size fudge. It called to mind Proust's Madeleine episode, the outbreak of the Eternal, not to say nostalgia, the memory of childhood confronted with this new adult life where insouciance will have to find a certain compromise with responsibility.

Woolworths was my "Island of Lost Children", an imaginary many-sided world that eventually helped me understand what had previously seemed insurmountable to me.

oh toi mon petit poney!, 2009

Approximately 10cm high x 4cm x 3.5cm

Fimo clay, synthetic stones, plastic stones,
glitter glue, glitter

Photograph by Jack Cole



Enamel Artist

'Penny Badge 1909' and 'Tuppeny Badge 2008' mark the dates that Woolworths opened and closed in the UK.

Penny Badge & Tuppeny Badge, 2009

Cellotape rolls, coin badges

Photograph by artist



Jeweller

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My aim was to make a piece for under £1 which would address the issues and perceptions of value in the use of non-precious materials for contemporary jewellery making. I chose the yellow rubber bands because they suggest gold chain links.

Worth It? – 51p, 2009

3m long

Rubber

Photograph by artist



Jewellery Artist

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The Pic'n'Mix Pins play on the famous Woolworths advertising slogan "Woolworths – Worth it!" They invert the meaning by spelling out the word "Worthless" whilst retaining the font and colour of the original logo. This word reflects the current state of Woolworths as an organisation forced into bankruptcy by the 2008/09 credit crunch, as well as the perceived value of the goods sold in its stores which were considered by many as 'worthless tat'. Furthermore, the pins have very little intrinsic value and are made from materials not ordinarily associated with preciousness. Grouped into several categories, each pin is inspired by a different product sold in Woolworths: colourful hair ornaments, candy, children's toys. Intended to be worn either individually, as a complete group or in new combinations, the Pic'n'Mix Pins encourage the wearer to express their personal memories, thoughts and feelings of Woolworths, its untimely demise and the economic situation.

Pic'n'Mix Pins, 2009

12cm x 6cm x 3cm

Photograph by artist



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